

# A mother's flu shot does double duty

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By Anita Manning, USA TODAY

SAN FRANCISCO — Babies born to mothers who received a flu shot during the last three months of pregnancy appear to be protected from infection during their first six months of life, a study suggested Wednesday.

The results of the study, presented at the Interscience Conference on Anti-microbial Agents and Chemotherapy, bolster recommendations for pregnant women to be immunized against flu, says researcher Mark Steinhoff of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Steinhoff says the results came as part of a study of a pneumococcal vaccine that involved 340 women in Bangladesh in their third trimester of pregnancy. Half of the women got the pneumococcal vaccine, and the other half got flu vaccine, which was used as a control.

Current vaccines are not licensed for babies under 6 months. The study suggests that immunizing pregnant women can protect babies during those months.

"Pregnant women ought to take the vaccine because it will protect them *and* their baby," Steinhoff says.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says pregnant women are at risk for serious medical complications from flu related to decreased lung capacity, increased heart rate and other conditions of pregnancy. But the message is not being heeded, says Gregory Poland, professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

"Among the groups for whom influenza vaccine is recommended, the lowest group (who receive it) is pregnant women, at 12.9%," says Poland, who wasn't involved in the study.

"I tell my patients: Get this vaccine to protect yourself and the baby."

Poland says some mothers are concerned about exposing the baby to a vaccine preservative, thimerosal, which contains a small amount of mercury, but studies have found "no known risk to the fetus," he says, while there is a clear risk from flu. "Women in the first trimester who get high fevers increase the risk of neural tube defects" in their children, he says.

Several other studies related to colds and flu are scheduled to be presented Friday. Among them, according to published abstracts, are:

- Scientists at the University of Virginia report on a study in which people who had colds checked into hotel rooms overnight. After they checked out, researchers found rhinoviruses, the most common cold germs, all over surfaces in the rooms, especially door handles, light switches, faucets, telephones and TV remote controls.

- A second study from the University of Virginia found that organic acids, such as malic acid (found in sour apples) and citric acid (found in oranges and lemons), kill rhinoviruses on the hands and prevent hand-to-nose transmission of the viruses for up to four hours.